

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REFERENCE

BELL, T.R. (1909): Common Butterflies of the Plains of India. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 19: 660-662.

31. OCCURRENCE OF *PSECHRUS ALTICEPS* POCOCK
(ARANEAE: PSECHRIDAE) IN WESTERN GHATS, KERALA
WITH A REDESCRIPTION AND NOTES ON ITS HABIT AND HABITAT

(With one text-figure)

Psechridae is one of the less studied families of Araneae. Till the seventies, only two species, *Psechrus alticeps* Pocock and *Fecenia travancoria* Pocock were recorded from India. Later, Tikader (1977) described *Psechrus nicobarensis* from Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Though the family does not show much species diversity, it is one of the most common spiders in the forests of Ernakulam district in Kerala. In the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA Pocock (1900) gives only a brief description of the species, which we found to be highly inadequate for identification. Hence a redescription of *Psechrus alticeps* Pocock is attempted here, with notes on its habit and habitat. Earlier, it was reported from Trivandrum (Ferguson 1906) and Cochin (Gravely 1922). We extend its distribution to three new areas in Kerala: Bhoothathankettu, Thattakkad Bird Sanctuary and Munnar.

Psechrus alticeps Pocock

(Fig. 1a-g)

1899. *Psechrus alticeps* Pocock, *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 12: 751

1900. *Psechrus alticeps* Pocock, *Faun. Brit. India, Arachnida*: 211

Specimens examined: 4 ♀♀, 1♂,

Bhoothathankettu 3.iv.2000; 3 ♀♀, Thattakkad Bird Sanctuary 5.i.2000; 2 ♀♀, Munnar 3.ii.2000, Habitat: Moist evergreen forest, Coll: K. Sunil Jose.

Cephalothorax: Longer than wide, cephalic region highly elevated, with posterior region flat and low. Carapace broader posteriorly. Eyes encircled by black base. Ocular quadrangle longer than wide. Eyes of posterior row recurved and anterior row procurved. Laterals larger than middle eyes in the anterior row, while in the posterior row, eyes more or less equal in size. Space between two rows of eyes broad. Clypeus moderately high. Chelicerae dark brown, strong, provided with boss, armed apically with four teeth on the inner margin and three teeth on the outer margin. Lateral sides of carapace bears a broad, longitudinal, yellowish patch with midregion of carapace darker. Fovea longitudinal, deep, situated posteriorly. Sternum heart shaped, clothed with fine hairs. Legs markedly long, slender, hairy with transverse bands. First leg nearly six times the length of carapace. First leg longer than other legs, third leg the shortest. Leg formula 1423. Tibia of first leg bears three pairs of ventral spines. Male palp as in Fig 1g.

Abdomen: Elongated, subcylindrical,

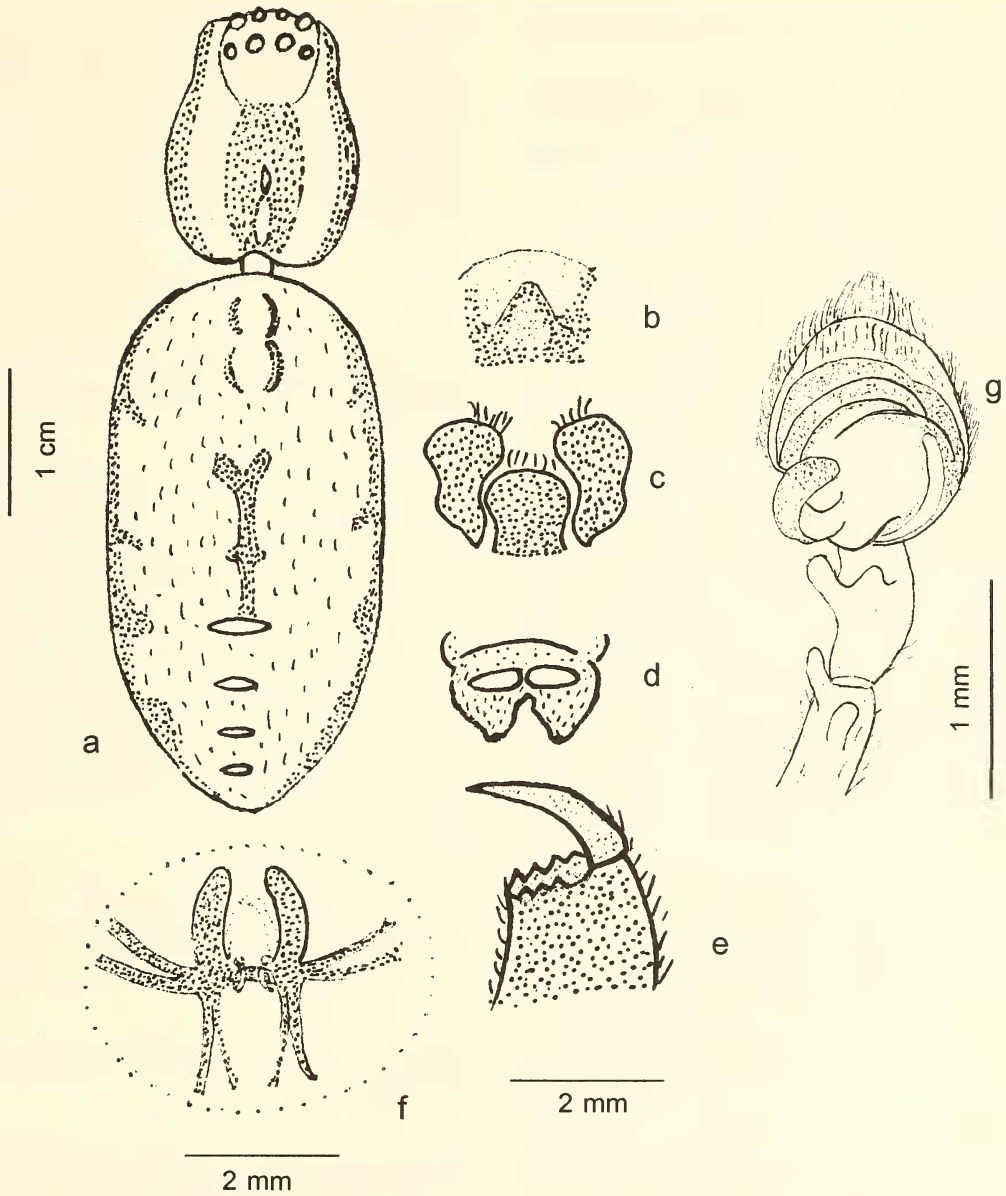


Fig. 1: *Psechrus alticeps* Pocock: (a) Dorsal view of the female, legs omitted, (b) Epigyne, (c) Labium and maxillae (d) Cribellum (e) Chelicerae (f) Internal genitalia (g) Male palp.

clothed with fine hairs. Broadest at the middle, narrows posteriorly. Dorsal surface usually yellowish to dark brown with posterior area darker. In younger individuals, dorsum of

abdomen variegated with black patches laterally. Ventral surface uniformly brown except a conspicuous midventral longitudinal white line. Cribellum large, divided transversely as in

Fig. 1d. Epigyne and internal genitalia as in Fig. 1b and 1f.

Measurements (in mm): Total length 24, Carapace 10 L & 7 W; Abdomen 15 L & 9 W. Legs I: 55, II: 45, III: 32 & IV: 46. Measurements (in mm) of original type: Total length 15, Carapace 6.5 L, and Leg I: 49 L.

Distribution: INDIA, Kerala: Ponnudi and Trivandrum (Ferguson 1906); Cochin (Gravely 1922), Bhoothathankettu, Thattakkad Bird Sanctuary, Munnar.

Habit and Habitat: *Psechrus alticeps* Pocock is a large, diurnal spider, spinning large sheet-like horizontal webs of 30-60 cm diameter. The spider remains upside down below the web, which is constructed among herbs or dark hollows at the base of large forest trees. It seems to prefer dark, shady and cool areas for web construction. The spider is very agile and escapes into the safety of its retreat at the slightest disturbance, which makes it very difficult to catch. Sometimes aggregates of many webs can be seen. Young individuals are more yellowish in colour, while older ones are usually more dark

brown. Unlike those of Araneidae, the web of *P. alticeps* is usually untidy, with many irregular threads below the sheet. It is permanent, not reconstructed each day. This species has not been reported from outside Kerala, the moist evergreen environment of which is presumed to be required for its survival.

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32. TAXONOMIC STATUS OF THE BOMBAY LUGWORM, *ARENICOLA* (ANNELIDA: POLYCHAETA)

In 1951, Mr. R.G. Dandekar, then Junior Research Assistant at the Taraporevala Aquarium, collected lugworms (*Arenicola*) at Haji Ali bay (opposite the race course, near present Shiv Sagar) off Darya Mahal, the palace of the erstwhile Maharaja of Gwalior.

As he was transferred to another post in the Fisheries Department, he could not follow up on publishing his findings, and Mr. M.R.

Ranade, then Senior Research Assistant at the Aquarium, published a short note (Ranade 1952). It is surprising that Ranade claimed that he had "discovered well-developed specimens of *Arenicola*...".

It appears that, around the same time or a little later, Dr. K.K. Nair of the Wilson College also collected specimens from the same locality (Dr. S.P. Karmarkar, *pers. comm.*).